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ABSTRACT

This paper reports findings of a study that explored the changing role of school principals in Washington State. Data were collected during stage 1 through focus-group interviews at an annual conference of a Washington State principals' association. During stage 2, a questionnaire was sent to all members (n=2,431) of the Association of Washington School Principals (AWSP). A total of 840 responses were received, a 34.6% response rate. Of the 840 responses, 687 were from principals with 5 or more years of experience. The data suggest that fundamental shifts have occurred in the role of the principal in Washington's public schools. Principals face increasingly complex interactions and tasks while simultaneously encountering limitations to their capacity to lead their schools. The data show an increased complexity in the scope and elements of school change and school programs. However, the capacity of principals to lead and develop shared leadership communities is constrained by the overwhelming nature of added responsibility, continuous innovation overload, an unclear empowerment for true direction setting, and threats to morale. The challenges described by the data reveal an imperative for shared and empowered leadership, in which the center of power is passed around and on the move. Finally, the data illustrate the need to build the leadership capacity of the schools. (Contains 38 references). (LMI)

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COMPLEXITY AND CAPACITY:
A SURVEY OF PRINCIPAL ROLE CHANGE IN WASHINGTON STATE

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INTRODUCTION

Sergiovanni begins his text, *The Principalship: A Reflective Practice Perspective* (1995) discussing the demands and constraints principals face in leading their schools. Particularly, he raises important questions regarding how demands and constraints "boundary" the context of choice for school leaders. With an aim toward what he calls, "reflective leadership" for effective schools, Sergiovanni appears to state the obvious--that the choices for effective leadership are hemmed in by the shifting demands and constraints of the current educational context. As Sergiovanni goes on to state, "In the face of the same demands and constraints, successful principals are able to find the necessary latitude that provides them with expanded choices and, thus, the extra margin needed for better performance" (p. 14).

For those concerned with leadership effectiveness in schools, with the preparation of school principals, and the on-going development of school leaders, clearly understanding the demands and constraints facing principals is crucial. Not only does such knowledge enliven our study of leadership, but I suggest that it is centrally important if we are to understand what is next for educational leadership theory and practice.

Organization of the Paper

This paper reports study findings of the changing role of school principals in Washington state. The first section of the paper presents the theoretical context and some of the informing literatures for this study. Additionally, I describe several policy changes in Washington state as background for the study. In the following sections, the methods and findings of a statewide survey of school administrators are reported, then themes developed and discussed. In the concluding section, I raise several questions about possible next steps in school leadership theory and practice.

Changing Contexts, Changing Roles

The pressures for school reform, legislated reform initiatives, and school restructuring are fundamentally affecting principals. School-based decision making, deregulated state structures, increased social complexity, curriculum reforms and a host of other changes have altered principals' roles (Fullan, 1991; Harling, 1989; Murphy & Hallinger, 1993). The changes affect not only tasks which occupy principals' time, but also substantially alter the competencies which enable school leaders to be successful.

In recent years, a number of changes have been initiated in Washington State public schools. These have included increased complexity in existing programs, state-initiated changes, and district-initiated changes. The centerpiece of legislated change was the state Education Reform Act adopted in 1993 which establishes (in part) a core curriculum of "essential learnings", and a

new statewide student assessment process which seeks to raise educational "standards" for the state's school children.

Importantly, these changes are being implemented at a time when many districts and schools are experiencing considerable shifts in their populations' ethnic and socio-economic composition. Schools are not alone in turbulent change, many families are struggling to meet the challenges resulting from complex family structures and economic pressures–pressures which can spill over into the school.

Attention has been given to the impact that these changes and the shifting contexts of public education are having on teachers, parents, and students as well as the responsibilities each of these groups have in implementing changes and adjusting to contextual shifts. Policy makers, parents, teachers and the public at-large assume that principals have the capacity to lead and supervise the implementation of these many programs and initiatives, as well as continuing to assume leadership for previously assigned responsibilities such as providing instructional leadership, managing resources, assuring a safe school environment, and responding to parent and community requests.

The Association of Washington School Principals (AWSP), responding to increasing concerns expressed by their members, established an advisory committee on the changing role of the principal. This advisory committee, in partnership with researchers at the University of Washington, designed the study outlined in this paper to assess role change in a more systematic manner beyond prior anecdotal data. This paper reports the findings of that study.

The Changing Role of the Principal

The role of the American school principal has often assumed a developmental aspect (Hallinger, 1992). As schools have changed, both in structure and context in society, the roles of principals have adjusted to meet expressed needs. When schools moved toward "open-plan" designs in the 1960s and 1970s, principals assumed a new set of roles and responsibilities for administering the school in the more open systems communication environment. When societal changes, such as the civil rights movement of the 1960s mandated school desegregation, again, the role of principals joined in responsibility for assuring the equitable provision for the education of a multicultural society–A challenge and responsibility certainly as important today as ever before.

The 1990s have not been different in that aspect. Particularly, in light of the critique of education and waves of reform following the publication of *A Nation at Risk* (NCEE, 1983) in the last decade, principals have found themselves at the center of education reform as it impacts their school.

Two aspects of change which seem to be of importance are the changes in the *boundary spanning* role of principals (Goldring, 1990; Vandenberghe, 1995) and the growing need for shared leadership in schools.

Clearly, in terms of the world of the school, what used to be a relatively closed and autonomous system is developing into a more complex and open system (Scott, 1981) which works in tandem with other branches of society. The integration of social services, the rise in business partnerships, and the influence of increased marketization of education have necessitated that schools, and those who lead them, be careful and creative participants in a broader community. The local school is rapidly losing its pedestal as the "only show in town." As a result, principals, and others who lead schools are increasingly responsible for a marketing their schools and building the links and bridges which connect their school to the public and private sectors of society. This "environmental leadership," as noted by Vandenberghe (1995) necessitates that, "Principals assume a more public role interacting with people in the wider community, forging links between the school and the environment... (exercising) the power to establish an acceptable balance between the (expectations of) the environment and the school's redefinition of these expectations" (p. 33).

Shared leadership is an idea which is gaining momentum (Wasley, Hampel, & Clark, 1997). Partly under the sheer weight of responsibility laid at the feet of today's principals, and partly owing to a greater sensitivity toward the capacity of leadership as an emancipatory tool, leadership is increasingly a shared capacity in the school. Leadership in the emancipatory vein is represented in the development of *critical leadership theory*, perhaps best espoused in the works of Smyth (1989; 1993). In writing from the perspective of critical theory, Foster (1989) reminds leadership theorists and practitioners that, "Leadership, then, is not a function of position but rather represents a conjunction of ideas where leadership is shared and transferred between leaders and followers, each only a temporary designation" (p. 49).

Shared leadership has long been evidenced in the effective schools literature. Taylor and Valentine (1985) note that in effective schools, "The leadership style of the principal encourages shared leadership" (p. 2). Aieta, Barth, & O'Brien (1988) look beyond the latter part of this century and predict even further need for shared leadership:

> Effective principals in the year 2000 will have to be the kinds of people who can recognize and utilize alternative leadership hierarchies, rather than try to be all things to all people... The principal must be the builder of a community of leaders within the school. (p. 19)

Shared leadership is presented as a new style of leadership based on collaboration and consensus building. One in which the principal will, "Orchestrate a governing process, rather than provide solitary decision making" (Aieta, Barth, & O'Brien, 1988, p. 18). As will be seen in the findings section of this paper, this is a prediction that has come to pass for many of the principals who participated in this research.

As shared leadership develops, and new perspectives of diffuse roles in leadership emerge from practice and theoretical debate, we may find Barth's comment of a decade ago to have acquired greater currency. Barth reminds us that,

> A community of leaders offers independence, interdependence and resourcefulness. While much of the current literature suggests that effective principals are the heroes of the organization, I suspect that more often effective principals enable others to provide strong leadership. The best principals are not heroes; they are hero-makers. (Barth, 1987, p. 32)

Turbulent Policy Environment

Perhaps beginning with *A Nation at Risk* (1983), but certainly extending well beyond it, the education policy environment can best be described as turbulent (Vandenberghe, 1995). By "turbulent", I mean that education policy, particularly as developed in the state and federal arena, are characterized by increased pace of change and conflict of purpose for educational practitioners.

For the school leader, this turbulent policy environment is translated into a working context that is difficult to predict, characterized by rapid change and unpredictability, and generally time consuming for practice. Vaill (1989) calls this, "permanent white water." The image is one of unpredictability, rapid change, and potential for both exhilaration and disaster. Vandenberghe notes the requirements for principals in this environment, stating:

> When schools exist in a turbulent policy environment, characterized by a set of unclear goals, ill-defined expectations, constantly changing requirements and administrative rules, one task of the principal assumes prominence. The principals must be able to justify permanently the general and specific decisions they make... to justify or legitimate the school's internal operation in the eyes of external constituencies. (1995, p. 33)

METHODS

The study of the changing principalship in Washington state was planned and conducted in two stages. In order to determine the categories of interest for further study, the first stage consisted of focus-group discussions with school principals. The focus groups were conducted at an annual state-wide conference of the state principals' association[1]. Analysis of the focus group discussions identified several issues and topics, which provided an initial list of topics to be considered for the main study. The information from the focus groups was reviewed by a study committee[2] of the Association of Washington School Principals (AWSP), who then asked

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[1] These focus groups were part of data collection for a research project carried out by a doctoral candidate at the University of Washington (Wulff, 1997).

[2] Committee on the Changing Role of the Principal. An ad hoc committee of the Association of Washington School Principals.

University of Washington faculty to prepare a means of collecting systematic data on the perceptions of role change in the last five years expressed by the membership. The central research question of the study was: How has the role of the principal changed in the last five years?

The second stage of research involved designing of a 55-item questionnaire, which after pilot testing and modification, was sent to the entire AWSP membership–virtually all principals and assistant principals[3] in the state. This questionnaire was returned only by those respondents with five years or more of experience.

A total of 2,431 questionnaires were mailed and 840 useful questionnaires were returned, resulting in a 34.6% response rate. Of the 840 questionnaires returned, 687 were from principals with five or more years of experience[4].

Each questionnaire mailed was coded to the individual respondent so that we were able to categorize the data by school level (elementary, middle, high), and district type (urban, suburban, rural). The distribution of respondents approximates the distribution of the population, although the suburban respondents are slightly overrepresented and the rural respondents are slightly underrepresented. There is not a statistically significant difference between the observed and expected frequencies of respondents by level.

The questionnaire was divided into nine topics: Delegated decision-making from districts to schools, the State Education Reform Act, recently implemented truancy reduction legislation, increased student and community diversity, site-based decision making, parent interactions, special education, school and community relations, and personal and professional impacts.

Procedures for Data Analysis

The questionnaire results were summarized and appropriate statistical tests were used to determine if significant differences existed among the various categories of respondents. The steps taken included:

1. Preparation of the returned survey forms. This involved collecting the returned forms, separating out the written comments, and preparing the machine readable forms for scanning by the Educational Assessment Center at the University of Washington. Forms were scanned by the EAC

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[3] The survey was mailed to both principals and assistant principals. The coding did not allow for a determining a distinction between principal and assistant principal respondents. For the purposes of this study, findings and discussion will refer to "principal respondents," but it is meant to include principal and assistant principal respondents.

[4] A second questionnaire for respondents with less than five years experience was returned from 153 respondents. The findings of that study are not reported in this paper.

and a summary database provided. Information from each respondent included: responses to each of the 55 items of the questionnaire, the level of the respondent (elementary, middle, high) and a district code (for district type: urban, suburban, rural). The individual identification number was not scanned into the database.

The next phase of analysis was carried out using the program SPSS 6.1 (Statistical Program for the Social Sciences).

2. Descriptive summary. Descriptive statistics were prepared for the entire return including: number of respondents in each of the nine respondent cells (urban elementary, urban middle, and so on), a total summary of the number and percentage of the total for each of the five points on the Likert scale (Strongly Agree–Agree–Undecided–Disagree–Strongly Disagree).

3. One-way Analyses of Variance. This test was used to see whether there were significant differences between the means by demographic or level for each of the 55 items. If the test statistic was significant, a second level of analysis was conducted.

3a. Post-hoc multiple comparison. The Scheffe post-hoc multiple comparison test was conducted to indicate which of the three cells of analysis (level or demographic) were significantly different from the others.

Limitations

The study organizers had aimed for a response rate of 40%, or above. A somewhat smaller response adds a certain degree of ambiguity to the data returned and should be kept in mind. In addition, The total number of respondents in the urban middle school (N=16) and urban high school (N=23) cells were particularly small (less than 5% of total respondents). Given this small number of respondents, the statistical strength of the interpretation should be viewed with caution.

FINDINGS

The findings of the study are reported below by each of the nine topic area of the questionnaire. In the next section, several of the linking themes of the findings are discussed.

Delegation of Decision Making From District to School

In recent years, a shift has occurred in the locus of some decision making from school districts to the school site level. In some cases this has been in response to perceived wisdom in locating decision making closest to the point of implementation, a trend that is shared in a number of public policy domains and in the political rhetoric. Other reasons for shifting decision making from what has been heretofore the purview of central office administrators have included a desire to reduce administrative expenses, and provisions contained in reform legislation for the enhancement of local decision making. As part of the state education reform legislation, schools are empowered to apply for what are known as "Student Learning Improvement Block Grants," or

SLIBGs. These grants are aimed toward facilitating the local implementation of curriculum reform legislation. These SLIBGs necessitate formation of a site committee, including parent representation, to oversee the initial application and use of the grant when received.

As a general finding, it is clear that the principals feel that there have, indeed, been changes during the last five years in the responsibilities for which they are accountable. Ninety-one percent of the principals indicated they are in districts that are decentralizing decision making to the local school site and 76 per cent were in districts that were initiating or encouraging the use of site councils. In terms of impact, this shift in the locus of many aspects of decision making has required a significant reallocation of administrative time and attention (86% agree, strongly agree), yet 54 percent indicated some degree of confusion in the parameters of this new decision making authority. This was particularly so for respondents from urban schools (83% of the urban respondents). These shifts are in addition to the responsibilities all principals have assumed under the provisions of state educational reform, truancy, and special education legislation.

Principals who responded indicated that they are generally feeling prepared for this new decision making (73% agree, strongly agree) and that overall, decentralized decision making has had a positive effect on their schools (73% agree, strongly agree). In addition, 79 percent of respondents indicated the teaching staff has generally been supportive of decentralized decision making for the school.

Effect of State Reform Legislation

The centerpiece of educational change in Washington state in recent years was the passage of ESHB 1209 (Engrossed Substitute House Bill 1209, 53rd Legislature, 1993), the state education reform legislation (OSPI, 1997a). The changes initiated in ESHB 1209 are not unlike those that have occurred in a number of states and could be viewed as representative of the types of reforms that are being implemented elsewhere around the country and in other nations (Swanson, 1989; Tyack, 1990). The central instructional components of this legislation, and subsequent legislation include: the establishment of a statewide "performance-based" education system with student learning goals and corresponding specific "essential learning requirements"; performance standards and a student assessment system; and a required "certificate of mastery" of the essential learning requirements in order to earn a high school diploma (Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, 1997b).

A number of new commissions and departments of the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction have been established for the purpose of overseeing efforts to improve education in Washington State. These state offices, in cooperation with the state organizations for teachers, administrators, school boards, and parents have worked collaboratively in order to support the early stages of the statewide plan for improving student learning. Implementation plans for

education reform are reported to be on a positive path (Plecki et al., 1997), although the education policy environment remains volatile and subject to the continuous debate between the political parties.

Across all four questions of the questionnaire for this item, there was support expressed for the effects of this legislation. Seventy-nine percent agreed or strongly agreed that their instructional program had been positively affected by the state's efforts for design and implement HB1209. Similar support was evidenced in the confidence that HB1209 will significantly influence the direction of education in Washington by the year 2000 (65% agree, strongly agree). In terms of their ability to provide instruction leadership, 65 percent indicated that it has enhanced their ability; and 81 percent felt that the Student Learning Improvement Block Grants were worth the administrative time necessary to obtain and administer the grants.

Although a high impact piece of legislation, the response was generally positive and supportive.

Compliance with State Truancy Reduction Legislation

In addition to educational reform legislation, largely aimed at teaching and learning, one other legislative enactment has significantly impacted the principals and assistant principals in Washington State. Commonly called the "Becca Bill" (Engrossed Second Substitute Senate Bill 5439), truancy legislation was passed by the 1995 legislature. The provisions of the bill were designed to tighten attendance and truancy recording and reporting in the wake of a highly publicized case of a runaway who was murdered while truant. The provisions of the new law establish a complex system of attendance reporting by schools to parents and truancy intervention by the courts. The legislation has had a significant impact particularly on urban secondary administrators (Williams & Portin, 1997b) although effects are experienced across all schools. This specific legislation was included in the study because of information provided by focus groups at the planning and pilot stage of the study.

Few legislative acts have had such a significant impact on school administrator time. Seventy-nine percent indicated that compliance with this legislation has required a moderate to significant amount of attention in their school. This is one of the response items where there were differences among the subgroups. Compliance with this legislation has had greatest impact on secondary schools (91% agree, strongly agree) versus elementary schools (65% agree, strongly agree). Although the differences are not statistically significant between school district type, the highest impact was reported by the urban schools (88% agree, strongly agree), followed by rural schools (80% agree, strongly agree), and suburban schools (74% agree, strongly agree).

In terms of specific impacts of complying with the truancy legislation, coordination with other authorities (court, police) was reported as being a demanding challenge by 61 percent of the

respondents and 77 percent felt that compliance has taken a disproportionate amount of administrative time when compared with other responsibilities.

At least at the point of this survey research, there was little support for the idea that when fully operational the provisions of the bill would significantly address the problems of truancy in their school. In addituon, only 27 percent indicated that they felt the legislation had provided them with the added authority need to address the problem of truancy[5].

Student Diversity Issues

In addition to managerial shifts in principals' responsibilities, work with students, parents and community have shifted in ways perceived as significant by the principals. The principals were asked, "(Excluding the needs of special education students) Would you say that the breadth of student diversity in your school (e.g. ethnic, economic, social, language groups) has changed in a way that has had an important impact on your school?" Seventy-six percent of the principals responded, "yes", to this question.

To understand the nature of that impact a series of follow-up questions were asked. Ninety-two percent agreed or strongly agreed that greater student diversity had changed the *scope* of their administrative responsibility, and 89 percent indicated that it had increased the *complexity* of their administrative responsibility. As with other changing factors, there was strong indication that this was another factor which requires administrative time and attention out of proportion with other responsibilities (81% agree, strongly agree). Additionally, 62 percent felt that they needed additional training if they were to respond to the breadth of student need and provide effective leadership. In terms of their perception of the positive impact of increased diversity on the school community, the responses were mixed. Forty-seven percent agree, or strongly agree; 27 percent are undecided; and 26 percent disagree with the statement that, "Overall, increased diversity has had a positive impact on our school community."

This is a complicated question and should not be interpreted as anti-diversity. The complexity of the issue is likely represented in the mixed responses to the final question. The intent was to understand relative impact, rather than a normative assessment. It is clear that this is simply one additional factor that is shaping the changes in principal roles.

Site-Based Decision Making and Site Councils

An element of devolved decision making from districts to schools has been the use of school site councils as means of collaborative site-based decision making. As indicated in the second section, one provision of the state reform has mandated establishing site councils to oversee

[5] It should be noted, that data collected two years after this study are suggesting growing support for the provisions of this legislation. This degree of negative response may indicate initial resistance which, subsequently, has waned as the procedures and details have been streamlined.

the use of block grant funds for activities associated with implementation of the state education reform act. Some districts have gone beyond this arrangement in scope. In fact, 76 percent of respondents indicated that their districts had directed or encouraged the establishment of site councils beyond those minimally required to oversee SLIBGs. There were significantly higher percentages of urban and suburban principals who indicated this to be so over their rural colleagues (92% urban, 88% suburban, 60% rural).

Half of the principals in this study indicated that working with site councils has consumed a disproportionate amount of administrative time, but a majority (64% agree, strongly agree) that site council decision making has had a positive effect on their school.

A linkage to the first section of the questionnaire (on devolved decision making) occurs in this section as well. As with devolved decision making, 54 percent of the respondents indicated that the role, process, and responsibilities of site council have not been clearly articulated by the school districts.

Interactions with Parents

The questionnaire assessed changing patterns of interactions both inside and outside the school. Eighty-three per cent of responding principals indicated that interactions with parents regarding individual pupils or general concerns had increased in a moderate or significant manner. As with other changes, increased interactions are perceived to be drawing disproportionately on administrative time and attention (61% agree, strongly agree) particularly when associated with time spent mediating conflict between and among students, parents and the school staff (82% agree, strongly agree).

Regarding the perceived results of increased interaction with parents, principals reported that expressed parent interest and expectation has led to more programs and alternatives being offered to students (63% agree, strongly agree). In terms of parents being more actively involved in defining student programs and progress, the results were mixed. However, suburban principals indicated the highest response (52% agree, strongly agree). This was the only group over the 50 percent mark and was statistically significant in difference from rural and urban principals.

Generally, the principals reported that teachers in their school welcomed increased participation of parents in the school and their classrooms (65% agree, strongly agree). This was more so for elementary respondents (79% agree, strongly agree) than for the middle school respondents (59% agree, strongly agree) or high school respondents (50% agree, strongly agree). Two-thirds (67%) of the principals responding indicated that, although taking more time, increased parent interest and expectation has benefited their school.

Special Education Programs

Administering special education programs and responding to student need presents a complex picture. In the first case, principals perceive that far more students seem to need special education services than five years previously (90% agree, strongly agree) and that these very programs are more difficult to implement than most programs of the school (70% agree, strongly agree).

Special education programs are reported as being disproportionately time consuming (77% agree, strongly agree) and that changes in funding levels have made it necessary for principals to reallocate regular education resources to meet the needs of special education students and programs (77% agree, strongly agree).

Special education inclusion programs have been a major shift in program policy and delivery models in many schools. As this was particularly mentioned in focus group discussions, we added a question in this section to assess the principals' perceptions. The opinions regarding the adequacy of special education programs to meet the needs of all students were quite mixed. Fifty-one percent disagree with the statement, 26 percent agree that special education inclusion programs are adequately meeting the needs of all students, and another 23 percent are undecided on the matter.

School and the External Community

The study planners were interested in understanding the perceptions of changes that principals were experiencing regarding their "boundary spanning" role with the external community. The questions in this section were designed to encompass communities beyond the parents of the school. A major theme of this section is what might be called the "public relations" aspect of the principalship. As with the other topics of the questionnaire, changes were clearly expressed on this matter.

In total, 83 percent of the principals indicated that they were spending more time and energy considering and planning for issues of public relations and school presentation to an external community that was the case five years previously. This included more time and attention to "marketing" the school in order to attract and retain students (74% agree, strongly agree), and meeting with parents who are considering school choices (71% agree, strongly agree). As a result, 91 percent indicated that they increasingly find that school decisions are being made which consider "client satisfaction" as a crucial outcome. This appears to be especially so for suburban principals (93% agree, strongly agree). An element of the marketing of the school that seems to consume a disproportionate amount of administrative time is an emphasis on standardized tests as an effective measure of school performance (61% agree, strongly agree).

Part of the overall strategy in linking with the external community that principals report using is the establishment of partnerships with businesses. Seventy-nine percent of the respondents felt that this was important. Given the needs expressed in the prior section to reallocate regular education resources to meet special educational needs, perhaps this is not an unexpected finding. Establishing partnerships with business was reported as important by all groups, but was most significantly affirmed by urban school respondents (91% agree, strongly agree) and high school principals (91% agree, strongly agree). One aspect of these external partnerships is time devoted to seeking grants form external sources (e.g. foundations, businesses, district, and state). Sixty-two percent indicated that this is impacting their use of time.

Professional and Personal Impacts on Principals

The final section was designed to assess overarching perceptions of both professional and personal impacts of perceived changes over the prior five years. In terms of professional impacts, it is not surprising that 91 percent of the respondents indicated that they were working more hours than they were five years before. Of particular interest, when asked if increased managerial responsibilities had *not* [6] affected their ability to provide instructional leadership and staff development, 81 percent disagreed, or strongly disagreed. When asked if they would like to see more decision making delegated to the school, the results were mixed. Forty-six percent indicated a desire for more delegated decision making, 25 percent did not wish more, and 29 percent were undecided on the matter.

Another related impact on administrative time was the perception that issues of safety and security had increased in the last five years (93% agree, strongly agree). Whether this issue had changed their sense of personal safety, the responses were mixed with 43 percent indicating a comparable level of personal safety, 46 percent disagreeing with the statement, and 11 percent undecided.

Personal impacts were measured on the basis of perceived levels of *confidence* in their ability to be an effective principal, *enthusiasm* for the job, level of *frustration* with the changes, and ultimately if the principalship is a route they would seek if given a second chance.

Respondents report a higher level of frustration (73 % agree, strongly agree), and mixed levels of reported enthusiasm (36% agree, strongly agree; 40% disagree, strongly disagree; 24% undecided). Contrasting these responses, 65 percent indicate a higher level of confidence in their ability to be an effective principal than would have been the case five years prior, and 72 percent would choose to be a principal again, if given a second chance. The data does not answer the question of whether increased confidence is related to increased experience, nor the reasons why

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[6] The *direction* of question wording was randomly reversed throughout the questionnaire.

28 percent indicated that they either were unsure or would not choose to be a principal if given a second chance.

DISCUSSION

The data from this study suggest that fundamental shifts have occurred in the role of the principal in Washington's public schools. From the widest view, the themes appearing from the data are increased *complexity* while simultaneously encountering limitations to the principals' *capacity* to lead their schools. Each principal has his or her own specific profile regarding the impact of the changes; yet it is clear, as a general observation, that the role of the principal in Washington State has changed in important ways.

Complexity

As the data reveal, the nature of the interactions and tasks of the school are becoming more intricate, diverse, and nettlesome. Within the school, principals encounter a greater degree of complication and challenge in meeting program and student need in a time of diminishing resources. For example, the respondents to this study indicate they are having to reallocate resources from regular education in order to meet the ever-increasing needs of special education. This reallocation confronts principals with shifting priorities and meeting program needs with less resources.

Complexity is not only evident in tasks, but also characterizes the interactions that occur in the school. New decision making structures, re-coordinated roles, and competing demands for diminishing resources color daily interactions to a great degree. Principals also speak of new links with decision making constituencies. Links with teachers have been expanded, as has the role of parents in the decision making process. Decisions are now more complex and require the participation of more participants. The rise of site councils and other forms of site-based decision making have ensured that many school decisions now involve greater consultation and collaboration. This transition has two edges to it. On the one hand, greater participation is generally regarded as an advancement and an enhancement to school effectiveness. On the other, the process can be more time-consuming and complex.

Capacity

The second general theme is one of restrained capacity. In defining capacity, I am referring to the resources for leadership across the organization and the ability of the organization to modify its structure to meet new designs. Schools are in the unenviable position of being "loosely coupled" (Weick, 1976) in one sense, while at the same time, many aspects of the decision making structure of the school are "tightly coupled" through legal parameters such as state code, collectively bargained agreements, reform legislation, and board policy.

In many respects, this dual aspect of coupling presents a paradox for principals. As they indicate in their responses to the questionnaire items, they are experiencing a much higher degree of local control and decision making in the school, at least in terms of process. However, at the same time they are unsure of their decision making parameters. The anecdotal comments from practitioners reveal instances when a decision is reached at the site level, only to be overturned at the district level owing to collision with an existing policy structure.

The rhetorical call for school principals to be CEOs of their school flies in the face of the existing degrees of freedom to affect the core technologies and operations of the school system. Principals and site councils are restrained from exercising, in many cases, the very decision making and direction setting which are so roundly called for in some aspects of school reform.

Another aspect of this restrained capacity for school leadership is represented in the differential impact of some of the changes. Some of the impacts are more concentrated in some settings than others. For instance, compliance with truancy legislation is more often reported by urban and rural principals than suburban principals, and by high school and middle school principals than elementary principals. More elementary principals report favorable faculty response to parental involvement in the school than do secondary principals. This differential impact is also evident in the growing difficulty finding applicants for certain leadership positions, particularly high school principals. There have been anecdotal reports of high school principalships drawing an applicant pool of only two or three qualified candidates in this state.

At a macro level, the data suggest that two general themes which describe the changed role of the principal are an increased complexity in the scope and elements of school change, and programs which principals deal with. The data further suggest that the capacity of principals to lead, and develop shared leadership communities, is hemmed in by the overwhelming nature of added responsibility, continuous innovation overload, and unclear empowerment for true direction setting in the school.

In addition to these larger thematic changes that are evidenced in the data, further themes arise which are worthy of discussion.

One More Responsibility

An additional interpretive finding is what has been called, "layering of responsibility" (Williams & Portin, 1997). It appears from the changes in education at state and district level that the responsibilities for principals are being "layered" one on top of the other. The time and attention, as well as associated demands of the evolving principalship, are reported as significant by the respondents to the questionnaire. Analysis of the data also indicates that principals are experiencing a tension associated with devolved responsibility without the attendant authority required meet the demands.

An example of layering of responsibility includes impacts such as compliance with the state truancy legislation. Principals have always held responsibility for student attendance and truancy as outlined in state code. However, with the passage of additional legislation, new responsibilities have been layered-onto existing responsibility. Now, in addition to reporting and attendance, principals must provide the added administrative time to monitor the paperwork requirements and coordinate with the court authorities. Some principals report, increasingly so, that this legislation has given them the tools to deal with previously intractable truancy problems, however, the point is that it is responsibility *added*, not replacing or updating existing responsibility.

The impact of layering of responsibility is evidenced in the increasing frustration expressed by the study respondents. Principals speak of their desire to lead their schools and to be involved in the development of the instructional program and strategic direction of the school. Instead, principals report that their capacity to take on additional responsibility is limited. They are reaching the point when nothing more can be added without considering what might be taken away from existing responsibilities.

Clearly, for policy makers, greater attention needs to be directed toward assessing the impact of policy decision on practitioners in the field. When a new policy is proposed, the impact of layered responsibility should be considered more fully in the planning process.

No Time for Leadership

A second theme is a reported shift from leadership to management. In speaking of a shift from leadership to management, I imply that there are differences between the two terms. There are as many ways to distinguish the two terms as there are theoreticians writing about educational leadership, but for the purposes of this brief discussion, let me suggest a few distinctions.

The distinction between maintenance activities and future-oriented activities, between reaction to change and pro-action in change initiation, is the striking difference between management and leadership is presented by Hellawell (1993). Managers, "initiate change within existing organizational culture. Leaders are quite prepared... to oversee changes in the organizational culture itself" (Hellawell, 1993, p. 34). With greater clarity, Sergiovanni (1991) takes an equivalent view, defining management as, "the routine behaviors associated with one's jobs" (p. 15), and leadership, which has more to do with, "initiation of new structures, procedures, and goals" (p. 16). The essential difference is activity associated with maintenance of the school, versus activity to develop the capacity of the individuals to fulfill the strategic mission of the school.

Part of the layering of responsibility continues to be the challenge of balancing leadership priorities for curriculum improvement and instructional supervision while at the same time meeting managerial demands of site-based decision making and reform implementation. Principals in this

study indicate their desire to lead, but as evidenced in their reports of time use, of "disproportionate" amounts of time toward managerial responsibilities, their ability to lead is restricted.

While most would agree that management is both appropriate and essential to good leadership, a question that arises from this study is one of balance. Have the pressures for reform and the expectations of high demand contexts boxed-in principals into a largely managerial role which leaves decreasing amounts of time to lead? The question is raised by the findings of this research, but the answers lie in further study and careful consideration for the provision for those who lead our schools–principals, teachers, and parents.

Threats to Morale

And finally, the respondents to the survey reflect a decline in morale and enthusiasm. The respondents are supportive of many of the educational reforms and express a commitment to school leadership, however, the load that is being placed on them is taking a toll. As mentioned earlier, the principals' association, and school districts are increasingly alarmed by the decreased numbers of qualified applicants for principal positions, especially at the high school level.

There is a level of discouragement which is evident in a number of the response categories. At the same time, there is also expressed confidence in their leadership abilities and a degree of optimism for the future (as evidenced by the majority who would choose the principalship a second time).

This study seems to suggest that principals are simply waiting for recognition that the challenges they face are complex, the answers to educational reform and student need are diverse, and all of it takes enormous amounts of time and energy.

FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS

A study of this nature raises interesting questions for both leadership theory development and the corresponding arena of principal preparation and on-going professional development.

The intent of the study was to gain greater understanding of what principals mean when they say, "My job as a principal has changed in significant ways." Although survey research, perhaps, leans more toward the broad brush strokes, the data from this study help to build what Greenfield (1973) so effectively called for: an understanding of the "phenomenological reality of administrators." It is through extended research, and delving into the perceived reality of principals and others, that researchers begin to gain an understanding of the challenges that face practitioners, as well as suggestions for the next steps in leadership theory development.

Opportunities for Distributed Leadership

Principals play critically important roles in the schooling system. There seems to be little chance of school improvement without principal leadership. It is important, in reform discussions, that their voices be heard and accurate information about their role be shared. This study focuses attention on the role of the principal for the purpose of adding "voice" to the policy discussions with legislators, school district boards of directors, superintendents and other district level leaders. However, the study can also be viewed from the perspective of a broader theories of distributed leadership (Handy, 1996; Williams, 1995).

As noted earlier, one challenge emerging from this study is the limitation on principal capacity for leadership. As new arrangements for local leadership of schools, for site-based innovation and change are encouraged, as schools continue to grapple with the interconnectedness of many societal institutions, the role of leadership distributed throughout the school may become increasingly important. This type of leadership, noted by Handy (1996), "shifts around" according to the task at hand and the stage that the organization is at. Although these notions of distributed leadership infuse the leadership literature in business and industry (Hesselbein, Goldsmith, & Beckhard, 1996), there are many opportunities for further progress the realm of public schools. These new leadership imperatives are summed-up by Witherspoon (1997) in the following:

> The exercise of leadership throughout the 1990s and into the twenty-first century is particularly affected by the increased rate of change occurring in the environment, and an increased interdependence between the organization and its external constituencies related to the acquisition and control of resources... In the future, leaders must become increasingly adept at understanding and initiating these partnerships and at establishing a variety of networks both in and outside the organization to create communicative relationships that will foster the achievement of individual, organizational, and community goals. One main reason why leaders must possess this ability is that our society, and organizations within it, are involved in a major transformation–a dramatic and irreversible change. Leaders must understand this phenomenon as they interact with organizational members now and in the future. (Witherspoon, 1997, p. 42)

Implications for Theory Development

Throughout the development of leadership theory there has been a continual challenge for emerging theory to deal with nettlesome problems; to explain the exceptions; to predict the unpredictable; and to propose a model that is transferable from leader to leader and leadership episode to episode. An examination of theory development in most introductory texts on educational leadership reveals a standard development from structuralist/formal models, to systems and ambiguity models. As earlier theories became less effective at explaining the complexities of organizational life, new theories were developed. Simplistic rational scientific models did not account for human intention and motivation, human relations models did not always provide for

efficiency, and contingency models do not readily address the problems of unequal power relations in organizations. As models of distributed leadership are further built to address the enhanced capacity of shared leadership, especially in devolved decision making, it seems likely that critical leadership perspectives, and particularly empowered leadership of broader constituencies, hold a great deal of promise. As Williams (1995) notes, "A significant yardstick for effective schools in the future will be the degree to which they develop as communities of leaders for pupils, teachers and parents" (p. 165).

A touchstone of theory development remains the essentially moral action of education, of equipping students for future success and reasoned participation in society. In this regard, Burns' (1978) call to moral leadership contributes to the ongoing development of theory, and even to leadership informed by critical theory.

> But the ultimate test of moral leadership is its capacity to transcend the claims of the multiplicity of everyday wants and needs and expectations, to respond to the higher levels of moral development, and to relate leadership behavior--its roles, choices, style, commitments--to a set of reasoned, relatively explicit, conscious values. (p. 46)

Building on the base of critical theory and empowerment, critical leadership has become an increasingly apparent term used to describe one view of re-formed leadership (Southworth, 1995). Watkins (1986) notes, "a critical approach, then, to the concept of leadership focuses on the power dimensions which underlie the process of reality construction and give force to the human agency of people in organizations" (p. 33). For Foster, "leadership is change, not control." Leadership, "is a process of engaging others in the critical analysis of individual and social realities and of establishing standards through which learning can be achieved" (Foster, 1989a, p. 14).

Again, the central theme of critical leadership is the establishment and pursuit of organizational structures and ends which enhance freedom and democracy. This is the ethical imperative articulated by Bottery (1992) and Codd (1989) and may help address issues of empowered leadership capacity in schools.

I have briefly discussed the notion of critical leadership in this section because, I believe, the challenges that are presented in the data from this study reveal a further imperative for shared and empowered leadership, leadership which is truly "passed-around." This stands in contrast, even with transformational perspectives, in that the center of power is on the move and suggests the potential for moving beyond the singular leadership of principals only.

For those who research leadership in schools, and contribute to educational leadership preparation programs, it seems crucial that we remain centered on the important questions of leadership in schools. When faced with changes in the role of principals, the questions remain:

- Who should lead our schools?
- How do we best prepare new leaders?
- How do we develop the leadership capacity within our schools?
- And, what continuing support do educational leaders need to ensure their effectiveness?

Future developments in leadership theory for informing prinicpal preparation will need to account for the challenges presented by this study data. Through study of new experiments in leadership reorganization in schools such as the site-based movement, restructured roles, and differentiated staffing, we may find future ways of conceiving leadership which will answer the concerns raised by this study.

Principals want to lead. As we continue to research the changing role, we should aim to find ways to not only support them, but to build the leadership capacity of schools in order to address the complexity of change that is yet to come.

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